

Let Us Follow Paul's Example
(1 Corinthians 11:1)

Introduction:

1. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 the apostle Paul called upon the Christians in Corinth to be "*followers*" [imitators] of him as he followed Christ.
2. We learn from Philippians 4:9 that "*the God of peace*" will be with those who follow Paul's teaching as well as his example.
3. In our lesson we are concentrating on the example that Paul set as he dealt with his "*thorn in the flesh*" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
 - a. These verses show us how Paul reacted to a serious problem.
 - b. We are making 4 observations from these verses to help us know how to react to difficulties when they come our way.

Discussion:

- I. IN DEALING WITH HIS PROBLEM, PAUL REALIZED THAT HE HAD IT, AND HE ADMITTED IT
 - A. Paul could have denied that he had a problem, but he did not.
 1. He admitted it, and he put it out in the open.
 2. He then dealt with it wisely.
 - B. Paul's problem was a thorn in the flesh.
 1. We do not know what it was, but it must have been very serious.
 2. Paul knew how to endure hardship (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).
 3. Whatever this thorn in the flesh was, Paul thought he would be better off without it.
 - C. The first step in overcoming a problem is admitting that it exists.
- II. IN DEALING WITH HIS PROBLEM, PAUL IDENTIFIED HIS ENEMY
 - A. The devil was his enemy.
 1. According to vs.7, Paul's thorn in the flesh was "*the messenger of Satan.*"
 2. Satan gave it to Paul to buffet him.
 - B. We have the same enemy today (1 Peter 5:8).
 1. We must not blame God for our difficulties (James 1:13).
 2. God actually puts limits on Satan (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Corinthians 10:13).
 3. Satan wants to destroy us, but God wants to help us.
- III. IN DEALING WITH HIS PROBLEM, PAUL IDENTIFIED HIS HELPER
 - A. After being given his thorn in the flesh, Paul could have:
 1. used his problem as an excuse to quit serving God
 2. could have blamed others for his problem
 3. dwelt on it continually, making himself and others miserable.
 - B. Rather than react in these unhealthy ways, Paul went to the Lord for help.
 1. When Paul went to the Lord for help he was persistent (vs.8).
 2. When Paul went to the Lord for help he accepted God's answer (vs.9a).
- IV. IN DEALING WITH HIS PROBLEM, PAUL REALIZED AND ACCEPTED THE GOOD THAT CAME FROM HAVING HIS THORN IN THE FLESH
 - A. Paul's problem served a useful purpose -- it kept him humble (vs.7).
 - B. (vs.9-10) Paul's problem brought him closer to the Lord.
 1. (vs.9b) He appreciated and trusted the power of Christ.
 2. (vs.10) By trusting in the Lord, even though he seemed to be weak, it was then that he was really strong.

Conclusion:

1. Paul's example has influenced numerous people for good -- from the Christians in Corinth to people living today.
2. This shows how important it is for us to react to difficulties in the right way.
3. When we face problems, our own spiritual welfare is at stake, and we have opportunities to influence others for good.